

THE BIRDS OF KENYA AND UGANDA.

PART II.

FAMILY.—PHASIANIDAE.

GENUS.—PTERNISTES.

BARE-THROATED FRANCOLINS, OR "SPUR-FOWL."

Francolins of the Genus *Pternistes* are readily distinguished from those of *Francolinus* by the absence of feathers on the throat and upper part of the fore-neck, and the presence of a large area of bare skin round the eye. The majority of *Pternistes* have either one or two pairs of stout spurs of more robust build than found in *Francolinus*.

Pternistes afer leucopareus, Fisch. and Reichw. Coast Red-throated Francolin.

Ref. Fisch. and Reichw. J.f.O. 1884, p. 268.

Type locality, Kipini.

Distribution: Coastal region of Kenya, from Witu to Vanga.

DESCRIPTION: MALE, ADULT.

Top of head ashy-brown shading to black on the forehead, each feather with a dark centre.. Mantle, scapulars and coverts of wing ashy-grey, with dark brownish shaft-streaks. Primaries and secondaries umber-brown, the former with pale outer webs, the latter with a slight amount of freckling towards the ends. Cheeks black; ear-coverts brownish; a trace of black and white supercilium; sides of head, side and hind neck and lower throat white, each feather broadly black along the shaft. Upper breast ashy-grey inclining to white on the lower breast and flanks, the feathers on the two first areas with black shaft-streaks, those on the last with black margins and black central stripe. Part of the lower breast and abdomen black. Vent and under tail-coverts ashy-brown. Thighs black and white internally, ashy-brown externally. Rump and rectrices umber-brown; under tail-coverts ashy-grey with whitish freckling and dark shaft-streak. Bare skin round eye and on throat blood-red; bill and legs coral-red.

The immature male answers to the above description except that the black of the underside is mottled with white, as also is the belly. The feathers of the rump, tail, and secondaries are heavily speckled and somewhat barred.

FEMALE:

Bears a general resemblance to the male, but the feathers of the cheeks, sides of head and feathered portions of the neck are white with black centres. The lower surface less black, each feather having a white shaft with a white tip.

JUVENILE:

The chick in down is unknown to me, nor does there appear to be a published description. The young in first feather is as follows: Top of head brownish; cheeks, throat, neck and upper breast whitish with broad black centres to the feathers. Undersurface of body mottled black and whitish becoming brownish on the lower part of abdomen and at vent. The back is ochreous-brown, heavily mottled with black and dark brown. The feathers of the scapular region and all the secondaries are speckled and barred with brownish-black. The outer primaries have ochreous margins to the outer webs profusely stippled with brownish-black. Bill and legs horn-brown.

HABITS:

The Coast Spurfowl is found in pairs or small coveys of four to six individuals, in the vicinity of forests or in thick bush. They are very shy and keep to thick cover during the day and are difficult to discover without the aid of a good dog.

In the early morning and towards sunset they leave cover and are found in the more open bush and grass lands. If flushed, they give quite good sport, but like all Spur-Fowl they take fright at the slightest provocation and go to cover immediately, trusting to their remarkable running powers rather than to flight.

The flight is strong, but not sustained, and refuge is sought in the nearest tree with promise of sufficient shelter.

The nesting seasons are not clearly defined but correspond more or less to the latter part of the rains. The nest is a shallow depression in the ground, sparsely lined with grass, and the site chosen is under a stunted bush or thick grass at the edge of the forest or bush country. Five to eight eggs are laid, creamy-brown in colour with fairly distinct pores and with a matt surface. They are slightly more pointed at one end. Size, 40 x 30 mm.

Both parents take part in incubating, and are very close sitters. A sitting bird is very difficult to see, so closely does its colour harmonise with its surroundings.

Pternistes oranchi Intercedens,

Reichw. Uganda Red-throated
Francolin.

Ref. Reichw. O.O. XVII, p. 88,
1909.

Type locality, Lake Rukwa.

Distribution: Uganda, from Elgon to Ankole, and Ruwenzori.

DESCRIPTION: MALE, ADULT.

Top of head dark brown shading to black on the fore-head. Eye stripe if present, black and white. Cheeks blackish becoming on the side of the head, black and white. Ear-coverts brownish with slight white striation. Throat and area round eye, crimson red. Feathers of neck, upper mantle and breast, white, with dark shaft-streaks and black vermiculations.. Mantle, rump, upper tail-coverts and rectrices umber-brown with darker shaft-streaks and fine dark-brown vermiculations. Wing-coverts as mantle. Secondaries umber-brown vermiculated, the inner ones with a darker brown oblique patch on the inner web. Primaries ashy-brown with paler vermiculations on the edge of the outer web. Feathers of breast, flanks and abdomen, greyish-white with darker shaft-streaks and very fine blackish vermiculations and wide bright chestnut edges. Thighs greyish-brown, externally and internally with fine vermiculations. Vent greyish, slightly barred. Under tail-coverts ashy-grey with darker brown centres and finely vermiculated. Bill and legs crimson-red.

FEMALE:

Very like the male but with the bare areas less extensive; the lower surface with less chestnut; and the scapulars and inner secondaries with coarser vermiculations. Bill and legs red.

IMMATURE.

Somewhat similar to the female, but more distinctly vermiculated and barred especially on the mantle and inner secondaries, and more whitish below, with fewer but coarser dark vermiculations and darker and wider shaft-streaks. The chin and most of the throat sparsely covered with blackish, white tipped feathers. Bill and legs brownish.

JUVENILE:

The chick in down is hard to distinguish from that of *Francolinus squamatus*, it is however darker chestnut-brown on the back; the eye-stripe is wide and buff in colour. The whole of the under-surface is sandy-buff, slightly darker on the breast. There are two wide buff lines running from the scapular region to base of the tail. In first feather the mantle feathers are dark brownish with pale tips, darker brown centres and wavy lines. The feathers on the under-side are whitish with coarse stippling and vermiculations and dark shaft-lines.

HABITS :

This Francolin is essentially a bird of the scrub and acacia country, frequenting the overgrown dongas and bush-fringed water-courses. During the heat of the day it lies up and is seldom in evidence, but as the sun nears the horizon it begins to stir. In a district frequented by these birds it is no uncommon thing to hear, just at sunset, three or four cock birds uttering their hoarse penetrating cry " Kareek, kareek," repeated several times in succession. With care one can approach a calling bird, and invariably he will be located standing on some prominent position such as an ant-hill or mound; so intent will he be on producing as great a volume of sound as he is able, that a careful stalk will meet with success; a false move, and he will suddenly stop his calling, slip off his mound and vanish into the grass like a flash. One may then tramp over the spot where he should be, but lucky is the hunter who puts his bird up without the aid of a dog! There are times however, when one may chance on these birds suddenly; they will then take flight, but not go far and when once alighted on the ground they run to cover and lie close.

I have never come upon a large covey of these birds but have usually seen them in pairs or very small coveys of four or so.

It is undoubtedly more common in the Toro and Ankole districts than elsewhere in Uganda, and is restricted to the lower altitudes.

Like most Francolin, the chief diet consists of roots, soft shoots, seeds and insects.

The nesting season, so far as my records show, appears to be during the months from April to July and in October. The nest is a shallow depression under a tuft of grass or stunted bush, lined sparsely with bits of grass, and fairly well concealed.

The eggs are a blunt oval with a finely pitted though not rough surface, and pale to deep buff in colour, measuring roughly 34 x 39 mm.

Pternistes cranchi böhm, Reichw. Kenya Red-throated Francolin.
Ref. Reichw. J.f.O. 1885. p. 465.

Type locality, Igonda, Tanganyika Territory.

Distribution: In Kenya; South Kavirondo, and Loita; and has been recorded from Elmenteita and Tana.

DESCRIPTION : MALE, ADULT.

Very like *P. c. intercedens* but with the breast and belly feathers purer white and with clearer vermiculations, the feathers on the latter area having blacker shaft stripes and wider chestnut margins. Bare area round eyes, and throat, orange scarlet. Bill and legs red.

The immature bird has the mantle and the wings (except the primaries) brownish with wavy lines of ochreous and dark brown, and has the underside of the body whitish, the feathers having transverse vermiculations of dark-brown and blackish.

HABITS:

This eastern race does not differ in habits from the form inhabiting Uganda.

Pternistes rufoplotus, Reichw. Grey-breasted Red-throated Francolin.
Ref. Reichw. J.f.O. 1887. p. 52.

Type locality, Wembere Flats. Tanganyika Territory.

Distribution: Western Uganda, Bunyoro to Ruanda.

DESCRIPTION: MALE, ADULT.

Top of head dark brown with darker centres and pale ends to the feathers. Superciliary stripe, black above, white below. Bare parts of head and neck outlined in black. Fore-neck grey, rest of neck black and rufous, with white centres. Undersurface of body including breast, flanks, and abdomen, white with broad rufous edges and black shaft-stripes. Belly greyish white. Hind-neck feathers with white edges. Feathers of mantle and coverts grey in centre, with blackish brown shafts and wavy transverse bars. Rump, upper tail-coverts and tail, greyish, with wavy transverse bars. Wings dark brown with paler more rusty cross bars. Naked parts, round eye orange red; on throat, orange-yellow. Bill reddish-brown, legs brown.

JUVENILE PLUMAGE:

This is unknown to me.

HABITS:

Similar to *P. c. böhmi*.

Pternistes leucoscepus infuscatus, Cab. Common Yellow-throated Francolin.

Ref. Cabanis, J.f.O. 1868, p. 413.

Type locality, Lake Jipe.

Distribution: The thorn-bush country of Kenya, from Taru and Teita through Ukambani and Southern Masai to the Kikuyu country; foothills of Kenia and Lake Baringo.

DESCRIPTION: MALE, ADULT.

Top of head ashy-brown with darker centres to the feathers. Fore-head laterally white continuous with a black and white superciliary stripe. Cheeks and side of head white, the feathers of the latter with

brownish shaft-streaks. Ear-coverts brownish. Feathers on hind-neck white with broad blackish-brown centres, those of the lower neck, breast, mantle, back and wing-coverts blackish-brown shading to rufous at the centre, and with cream shaft streaks which gradually widen out towards the tips of the feathers. A certain amount of fine speckling is present on the mantle and secondaries. Long feathers on flanks, dark-brown, with rufous tinge at shaft, wide creamy-white margins, and a triangular white spot at tip. *Practically no white along the shafts.* Secondaries brownish with greyish edges to the outer web, and vermiculations of ochreous, especially outwardly. Primaries brownish with a large creamy patch on the inner web, and with a slight edging of the same colour on the outer web. Lower abdomen and vent ashy-grey with broad whitish tips to the feathers. Thighs whitish with dark centres. Rectrices ashy-brown vermiculated with ochreous buff.

Bare area round eye orange-red; chin of the same colour shading to yellow on the throat and fore-neck.

Bill and legs horn-brown; gape reddish. Nostrils red.

IMMATURE MALE:

Very like the above but with the feathers of the breast, mantle, back and coverts with broad triangular spots at the ends of the shafts, and with the inner secondaries more bodily vermiculated so as to be almost barred.

FEMALE:

Similar to the male on the underside, but on the upperside much more vermiculated, especially on the scapulars and inner secondaries.

Young birds in second feather have the underside rather more striped than spotted, due to the whitish centres of the feathers being almost as wide as the dark margins. The secondaries, rump and tail are more transversely barred and the pale vermiculations are broader.

The "Cheeper" in first feather is light brownish above, boldly spotted and vermiculated with ochreous brown, and is whitish below—the feathers on the breast decorated with lines of broken spots and streaks.

The chick in down is dark chestnut on the head, with a pale sandy superciliary stripe. The back is mottled dark and lighter brown, with a certain amount of blackish mottling along the dorsum. The whole of the underside is sandy buff, slightly more ochreous on the chest.

HABITS :

The common " Spur-Fowl " is found in the neighbourhood of native shambas, and bush country and in grass-lands where there are stunted bushes to give cover. A favourite locality to find them in is a bush-fringed donga or dried-up watercourse. They are also very partial to the stony hillsides where stunted olives and other trees abound. In the early morning, just at daybreak and for an hour or two afterwards the cock birds start calling, their harsh grating " koarek koaree " being heard at a considerable distance. Calling again takes place in the evening; and it quite common to hear the birds call just before and particularly after rain. Both male and female have the same call, but the latter is less frequently heard.

The " Spur-Fowl " feeds chiefly in the early morning and again at evening. During the heat of the day they lie up close in thick cover and are difficult to find without a good dog.

They are very partial to patches of native tree-beans and potato and may here be seen in small coveys of six to ten busily scratching amongst the leaves and debris. They love scratching up and turning over the low piles of wilting weeds which natives leave between the rows of growing beans; such places team with insect life. Like most gallinaceous birds these Francolin are very fond of a sand bath; and in the old days it was no uncommon sight to see several birds thus engaged along the Fort Hall Road.

A tree to a Spur-Fowl is a place of safety—flush your birds, and if there is a tree nearby, they will go into it; they then sit tight and very often one has to get a beater to throw stones into the tree or shake it before the birds will break cover. I have known of " Koari " being taken by hand by a native who quietly ascended a tree and captured the birds as they sat hid in the thick foliage. These birds give fair sport if walked up with dogs, or driven with beaters, but they are loth to take wing. Their running powers are marvellous and even when going at a good speed they carry the body very erect.

Their food consists largely of insects, grain, roots and green stuff. They do a certain amount of damage to growing maize, but this is more than compensated for by the amount of injurious insects they devour.

The nesting season is prolonged and dependent on the rains to a considerable extent. My records shew that eggs have been noted in the months of February to July and again in October and November, while chicks have been seen in practically all months of the year.

The nest is usually to be found under a bush or in dense grass. A shallow depression the earth suffices, to which a few bits of grass are added. The clutch varies from five to eight, very occasionally more;

in colour the eggs are pinkish-buff finely freckled. Size 45-47 x 35-40 mm. The parent bird sits closely. The maternal instinct is well developed and the defence which a hen puts up in protection of her chicks is not unlike that adopted by the ordinary "barn-door" fowl. She will attack and fly at a dog or small Mongoose, but if a human being disturbs her she will adopt the broken wing stunt and will flutter along the ground away from the crouching chicks in an endeavour to attract attention from them.

The foregoing notes apply to the race of Spur-Fowl which is most widely distributed in Kenya, we have yet to consider the other named races of *Pternistes leucoscepus*, which occur within the limits covered in these notes.

The late Dr. Mearns recognised the following:—

Pternistes leucoscepus keniensis, Mearns. Mt. Kenia
Yellow-throated Francolin.

Ref. Mearns, S.M.C. Vol. 56, No. 20,
p. 1, 1911.

Type locality, Slopes Mt. Kenia,
6,500 ft.

Distribution: Between 6,000 and 7,000 ft. on Kenia.

DESCRIPTION:

"Differs from *P. l. infuscatus* in its generally darker coloration; in the absence of transverse bars on the wings and tail, which instead of being barred are minutely speckled and vermiculated; in the much narrower white borders of the feathers of breast and sides, *those of the flanks having white shaft-stripes*; and in having the thighs and crissum darker and without pure white edges."

Pternistes leucoscepus killimensis, Mearns. Ref. Mearns, Op. cit.

Type locality, Mt. Kilimanjaro.

DESCRIPTION:

Said to differ from *keniensis* to which it is most allied in having a more "castaneous tone of colouration"; "the light specklings of the wings and tail and the shaft-streaks of the mantle and wing-coverts are chestnut or rust color instead of grayish or buffy white; the concealed pale markings of the wing-quills are decidedly rusty instead of nearly white, the white edgings to the feathers of the breast and sides have the chestnut colour extending to the subtriangular white spots at the tips of the feathers."

I have quoted these descriptions at length because I am not prepared to deny the validity of these races. Recent writers, including W. L. Sclater in *Systema Avium Aethiopicarum*, 1924, p. 92, and myself in *Novitates Zoologicae* 1922, p. 26, have cast some doubt on the validity of *keniensis* and have declared *kilimensis* to be unsound. The lack of topotypical examples prevents me from expressing an opinion now. There seems to me to be no reason why there should not be a local race on the higher altitudes of either Mts. Kenia or Kilimanjaro, and though the type of *infuscatus* came from near Kilimanjaro, it must be remembered that this locality is included in the low-lying scrub and thornbush zone which differs considerably from the alpine conditions of Kilimanjaro.**

A further race occurs within the Kenya boundaries as follows:—

Pternietes leucoscepus

muhammed-ben-abdulla, Erl. South Somali Yellow-throated Francolin.
Ref. Erlanger, Monatsb. xii, p. 97, 1904.
Type locality, El Wak-Bardera.

Distribution in Kenya: Jubaland, west to the Lorian, and N.E. of the N. Guasso Nyiro and Marsabit.

DESCRIPTION:

Somewhat like *P. l. infuscatus*, but with the whitish markings of the upper side including the wing-coverts, and those of the under-surface, much wider; the flank feathers having a wide white shaft-streak.

Immature birds are very much paler than young *infuscatus* of the same age.

HABITS:

As for other races.

We now come to consider the birds inhabiting the northern parts of Uganda through Karamoja, South Rudolf, eastwards to Loroki and Ndoto.

Through the kindness of Capt. Stoneham I have been able to examine specimens from Kakamari. In my opinion these birds are quite distinct from typical *infuscatus* from Lake Jipe. They are

** I would here take the opportunity of asking members to assist the Museum in securing examples of these birds and other "Game Birds" so that the collection of topotypical examples may be completed.

very much darker, more blackish, and the whitish-cream marking of the underside are much more distinct as a result of contrast and the angular white ends are much wider especially on the flanks. There is furthermore very little chestnut along the shafts of the flank feathers. The uppersurface from the crown to the rump is very much darker and less brownish; here again also, though the white shaft-streaks are comparatively narrow yet they are rendered conspicuous by virtue of contrast with the rest of the feather.

As we go further east and south to N. Laikipia, Ndoto, etc., we get the same dark bird but with more chestnut along the shafts of the feathers on the lower-breast and flanks, and different from the Kakamari birds in having the white shaft-streak of these flank feathers hardly expanded at the tips. Birds of this description intergrade with the Lorian race in the thorn-bush country north of the N. Guasso Nyiro, and with *infuscatus-keniensis* intergrades in the Laikipia area. In the case of a species with a very wide distribution covering areas with marked change of altitude and consequent variation in climate and vegetation, it is not surprising to find no clear line defining the various races.